



State of Connecticut
Department of Rehabilitation Services
Office of the Commissioner

Testimony by Amy Porter, Commissioner
Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)
Program Review and Investigations Committee
September 24, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, and distinguished members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. I want to thank you for looking at the issue of Transitional Services for Youth and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder and for allowing me to testify. My name is Amy Porter and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). DORS provides a select set of services for youth and young adults on the autism spectrum, primarily in the area of employment.

Through our Vocational Rehabilitation Program, our agency assists individuals with disabilities, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorders, to prepare for, enter, maintain, or advance in employment. The services are individualized and designed to assist an individual in competitive, integrated employment. There is a wide array of available services, including such options as training, assistive technology, job placement services and job coaching. An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) outlines the intended job goal, services that will be provided, and the responsibilities of both our agency and the individual receiving services. We have assigned a liaison to each of Connecticut's high schools to ensure that all students with disabilities are aware of our services.

While our programs and services are individualized, we have a couple of initiatives that relate more specifically to our work with individuals on the spectrum – an Autism clinical team and a target summer youth employment experience. Approximately ten years ago, we were analyzing the population trends and projected that there would be an influx of individuals on the spectrum entering our Vocational Rehabilitation program starting around the year 2010. To get ahead of the curve, we created a clinical team to provide support at both an agency level and an individual consumer level. The clinical team is made up of a licensed psychologist specializing in work with adults on the spectrum, a parent of an individual on the spectrum who also works as an advocate, a parent of an individual on the spectrum who works in postsecondary education, staff from the Department of Developmental Services, and staff from our Vocational Rehabilitation program. At an agency level, the clinical team worked to identify best practices for our programs, and continues to work with us on refining these best practices as we encounter different scenarios. At the individual consumer level, our clinical team has been meeting monthly since its inception with individuals, families, and service providers to recommend individualized approaches and strategies for three families each month.

Our agency has also run a summer youth employment experience each of the past four years. The program supports real-work experiences for the summer months. This year, we targeted our consumers in unserved and underserved populations, which include youth and young adults on the Autism spectrum. We provided additional training for our community rehabilitation providers focused on our best practices and focused recruitment on this population. The program will wrap up on September 30th, and we have assured the staff from the Program Review and Investigations Committee that we will provide our final data when it becomes available.

Employment is a critical indicator of independence for all individuals, including those with disabilities, but we are keenly aware that it is only part of the puzzle. The Department of Developmental Services and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services play key roles in the support services an individual on the Autism Spectrum might need outside of their immediate employment needs and we have strong working relationships with both agencies. We look forward to being part of the discussion and part of the solution for the state's work with this population.

Thank you for your time and attention and I welcome any questions that you may have.